Deforestation in Santhal Pargana division

3578. SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large scale deforestation is taking place in Santhal Pargana division specially Pakur and Sahibganj districts;

(b) whether this is a result of large scale illegal mining and also due to connivance of forest staff; and

(c) if so, what action including action against the corrupt staff, Government propose to take?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) As per State Forest Report, 1999 there is net increase of 25 Sq. Km. of forest cover in the district Santhal Pargana including Sahibganj and Pakur also in the State of Jharkhand since the last assessment 1997.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Alternative employment to fishermen

3579. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering a proposal to place whale shark fish in schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps Government propose to take to provide alternative employment to fishermen who are mainly dependent on the export earning of fish?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) Whale Shark has been included in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 *vide* notification No. 1- 2/2001 WL-I dated 28.5.2001.

(c) Veraval, where Whale Sharks congregate in large number, has a potential for Whale Shark based eco-tourism. This Ministry has requested the Tourism Department to initiate action for the creation of tourism facilities along the Gujarat coast and involve the fishermen in this endeavour.